



# Leveraging Reset Opportunities TO HELP STUDENTS AND STAFF THRIVE

After a challenging quarter, semester, or couple of months before a break, how can you and your students not just survive the rest of the school year but thrive? Take an opportunity to reset before jumping back into the school year!

**What do we mean by thrive?** Research tells us that for people to thrive, they need to feel grounded as individuals and as a community, experience well-being, and have agency to meet the demands of life.<sup>1</sup> To help students and staff thrive, school-based practitioners—including administrators and staff—can implement practices to build individual capacity as well as supportive environments.

**What do we mean by reset opportunities?** The physical, cognitive, and emotional space offered by school breaks provide an opportunity to step back, clarify priorities, and strategize improvements. For teachers, this may mean revisiting classroom norms, trying out a new instructional approach, or supporting students in developing a specific skill. For administrators, this may mean revising a policy, establishing a new team, or stopping a practice that was not working.

Below we present a set of practices for use by two categories of school-based practitioners:

- *school administrators who directly support staff or*
- *classroom teachers or other staff who directly support students.*

**For each of these practitioner categories,** practices are grouped by the key components of thriving (grounding, well-being, and agency) and focus on either building individual capacity or building a supportive environment. This list of practices is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, it is a starting set of practical ideas. Individuals or teams of practitioners can use this tool as they consider how they might strengthen and refine current practices.

## Practices for School Administrators Who Provide Direct Support to Staff



Needed for  
staff to thrive

### Grounding



Practices for building individual capacity

### Share the following activity for staff to complete:

A part of thriving is being able to ground in our individual identity and feel a sense of collective identity. Create an [identity chart](#) and use the following to prompt personal reflection.

- Which parts of my identity are most important to me?
- Which parts of my identity do others assign to me versus what do I assign to myself?
- Which parts of my identity do I show my students? Colleagues? Families? Why?
- How do the different parts of my identity influence how I interact with students? Colleagues? Families? What do I wish others knew more about?
- What would make me feel safe to show up fully at work?
- What do I see as the collective identity of our school? How does that align with my personal identity?



Practices for building a supportive environment

As a staff or as department teams, build in time to share identity charts and discuss reflections together. Consider what setting would feel safe for folks to share honestly.

- As staff share what they need in terms of showing up fully at work or how identities shape interactions, consider what changes you can make to build a supportive environment in which staff feel safe and valued.
- Discuss the collective identity of the school and consider what needs to shift to better align with the identities of staff, students, and families.
- Consider ways to continue this conversation and monitor if there is any improvement.

1. Osher, D., Pittman, K., Young, J., Smith, H., Moroney, D., & Irby, M. (2020). *Thriving, robust equity, and transformative learning & development: A more powerful conceptualization of the contributors to youth success*. American Institutes for Research and Forum for Youth Investment.



### Needed for staff to thrive

#### Well-being



### Practices for building individual capacity

#### Share the following activity for staff to complete:

Overwhelmed by your to-do list? Map it out, identifying your needs as well as solutions that can help address them within your current context and capacity.

- Write out your responsibilities as well as activities that support your well-being (everything from lesson planning to family dinner).
- Now, identify which of these are “must do’s,” “can do’s,” and “can drop this.”
- Look at your lists again, and question—are there items on my “must” and “can” lists that I can drop? What would happen? Adjust as needed.
- Identify whom you can go to for support.

Experiment with this list—see what happens as you shift around priorities and tasks. Notice your strengths. The goal is to be great at the things you need to be great at (and yes, that includes doing what you need for yourself), and drop the things that you can drop with little consequence.



### Practices for building a supportive environment

Staff are overwhelmed and often juggle competing needs and priorities. To help staff relieve stress, consider doing the following:

- Facilitate listening circles or gather feedback through other mechanisms regarding what is overwhelming them. Staff need to feel supported.
- In light of what you heard from staff, examine staff responsibilities and tasks and identify where you can be flexible, keeping only what is vital to complete for the rest of the school year.
- Conduct a meeting audit and adjust schedules to give staff more time for their own work.
- Implement staff breaks—both regularly scheduled and when staff are in need or crisis ([Tap-In/Tap-Out](#)).
- Implement well-being practices that are impactful and considerate of staff time.

#### Agency



#### Share the following activity for staff to complete:

Part of thriving is being able to live our values. Let’s set an intention that aligns with your values.

- Write down two to three of your top values.
- For each value, consider actions that you take that align or misalign with that value. Reflect on how these actions impact you and your school community.
- Choose one value and identify one way you can act more in alignment with your daily routine. Write it down on a sticky note and place it somewhere prominent to serve as a reminder.
- Notice how it goes for a few weeks. Adjust as needed.
- Check out this [Values to Action Tool](#) for more.

In a staff or department meeting, ask staff to share their values and actions and then do the following:

- Discuss how you can support each other in living those values.
- Identify shared values among your teams. Discuss how these values impact your school community.
- As an administrative team, consider how you can further support staff by creating pathways for staff to contribute meaningfully to the school community around their values, being mindful of doing so without adding to staff members’ individual and collective plates.
- Consider ways to continue checking in with staff.

Consider how values align with school policies and practices using this [Values to Action Tool](#).

## Practices for Classroom Teachers and Other Staff Who Provide Direct Support to Students



Needed for  
staff to thrive

### Grounding



Practices for building individual capacity

Part of thriving is being able to ground in our individual and collective identity. Have students create an [identity chart](#). Share as a class and discuss together. Consider guiding questions that are most relevant to your students:

- Which parts of my identity are most important to me?
- Which parts of my identity do others assign to me versus what do I assign to myself?
- Which parts of my identity do I show my peers? Teachers? Family? Why?
- How do the different parts of my identity influence how I interact with others?
- What do I wish others knew more about?
- How is my identity reflected in this class? This school?



Practices for building a supportive environment

As students share about their identities, consider what changes you can make to build a supportive environment in which students feel physically and emotionally safe and valued.

- Are all student identities represented in learning materials? In classroom visuals?
- Are there policies and practices that need to shift to better support student identities?
- Are there assumptions I make about individuals and groups of students based on their identities? How do I change that?
- Are there things I need to unlearn or learn to better support my students?
- How do my identities impact my interactions with different students? What do I need to be more mindful of, particularly in the moment when things get tough?

Consider these [Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education](#).

### Well-being



Help students build connections in the classroom. Extend time at the beginning of class or the beginning of the day to allow students to check in with themselves and with each other. Consider prompts that allow students to

- notice and share how they are feeling;
- share stories;
- ask for and offer support;
- stretch and move; and
- take a moment to pause.

To create an environment that supports student well-being and SEL development, consider the [SEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook](#), which includes

- welcoming inclusion activities or rituals like greeting students by their preferred name;
- engaging strategies, including brain breaks that are responsive to students' needs; and
- optimistic closures that can highlight a sense of accomplishment and learning.

For students who need additional support, screening tools can be useful for schools to understand how to identify and address the mental health needs of the children and adolescents they serve. Check out this [mental health screening](#) worksheet for more.



### Needed for staff to thrive

#### Agency



### Practices for building individual capacity

Have students explore

- what is important to them;
- what they want to learn more about; and
- what they would like to see in the school community.

Brainstorm together ways students can contribute to the class and the school community (e.g., leading a lesson, setting class rules together, exploring a topic that interests them or impacts their community).

For more, try these [practices to support student autonomy and empowerment](#).



### Practices for building a supportive environment

Apply what students shared in their exploration and brainstorm. When you can, point out when you are applying it so students can see that they are being heard.

- Provide opportunities where students can lead or coteach.
- Consider how you can shift your teaching practices to allow students to drive learning and exploration.
- Make space for students to connect and voice their perspectives.
- Collaborate with students to better the school community. Consider a practice like [listening circles](#) to start.

